



Department of Veterans Affairs

# Diversity@Work

<http://www.diversity.va.gov>

Volume 12, Issue 8  
May 2013

## Message from the DAS

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### Bookmarks:

National Veterans  
Organization of America  
<http://www.nvo.org>  
Non Commissioned Officers  
Association  
<http://www.ncoausa.org>  
Student Veterans of America  
<http://www.studentveterans.org>  
TREA: The Enlisted  
Association  
<http://www.trea.org>

Do you have an EEO complaint?  
Contact the Office of Resolution  
Management at (888) 737-3361  
within 45 calendar days of the  
alleged incident.

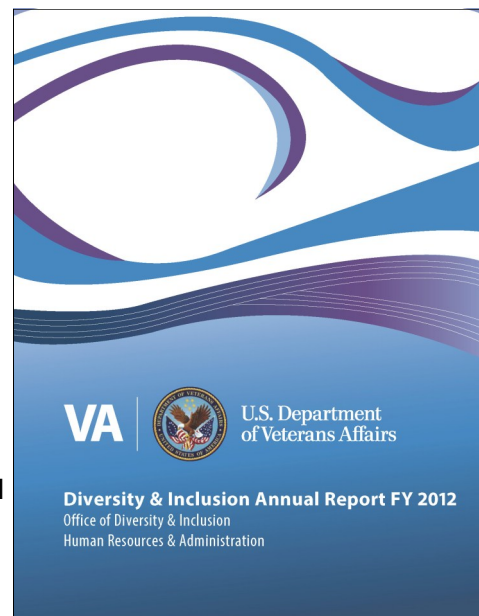
It's that time of year when we reflect on all of our accomplishments in the areas of diversity and inclusion. First, we are pleased to announce the winners of the Secretary's Third Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program! Read about this on [page 5](#).

I am also excited to announce that we have updated VA Directive 5975, which provides the policies, program requirements, and responsibilities for conducting VA's diversity and inclusion program. Among the major changes is that ODI is now officially designated as the office responsible for the VA-wide diversity and inclusion program and policies. Read more on [page 6](#).

I am pleased to announce the publishing of VA's Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 which will soon be available at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/diar.aspx>. VA's Diversity Index continued to trend upward for the fourth year in a row. VA's Management Directive 715 FY 2012 EEO Report and FY 2013 EEO Plan will also be available soon at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/reports.aspx>.

The National Hispanic Medical Association recently invited me along with Uchenna Uchendu, MD, Chief Officer, Veterans Health Administration Office of Health Equity, to be the keynote speakers during the Federal Leadership plenary event at their Annual National Conference in Washington, DC.

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## Commemorate

### Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

VA proudly joins the Nation in celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month during the month of May. This year's theme is "Building Leadership: Embracing Cultural Values and Inclusion."

This month we recognize the vast contributions made by AAPIs to our culture and our Nation. In 1992, Congress passed Public Law 102-450 which permanently designated May of each year as "Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the estimated number of U.S. residents of AAPI descent comprised 18.5 million or 6.0 percent of the total population. As of March 31, 2013, AAPIs represented 7.09 percent (23,300 employees) of VA's workforce. However, AAPIs still have a less than expected participation rate at the GS 12-14 and SES/Title 38 equivalent pay grades when compared to the pay grade distribution of the total workforce. [Continued on page 7.](#)

# Message from the DAS

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It was an opportunity for us to speak about increasing representation of Hispanics in the Veteran community, VA's effort to ensure we have a culturally competent health care workforce to address their needs, and VHA's direction with regards to addressing health disparities and inequities.



*Georgia Coffey*

Finally, this May we commemorate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Jewish American Heritage Month, and Older Americans Month, as well as the National Day of Prayer on May 2, Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 10, National Women's Health Week May 12–18, and Armed Forces Day on May 18. Read about these observances beginning on [page 1](#). ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

## Field Notes

### **Hispanic Employment Program Managers National Teleconference May 20**

The next Hispanic Employment Program Managers (HEPM) teleconference will be held Monday, May 20, from 3 to 4:15 p.m. (EST). Participants may dial in to this teleconference at 1-800-767-1750 (access code 70087). For more information, contact Arlene Gonzalez, National HEPM, ODI, at [Arlene.Gonzalez2@va.gov](mailto:Arlene.Gonzalez2@va.gov).

### **Sign Up to Receive Monthly LGBT Literature Search**

The Library Network Office is producing a monthly literature search on health related Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) articles. If you would like to have this Literature e-Alert automatically delivered to your in-box, just follow these simple steps (please note, this service is only available to those with VA email accounts):

1. Visit <http://www.va.gov/library>.
2. Click on the Alerts link in the VHA National Desktop Library box (right hand side of the page).
3. Click on the Literature e-Alerts form link and select (top of second column) Monthly PubMed/Medline Alerts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender.

While on that page, feel free to subscribe to any of over 60 news or PubMed Literature e-Alerts offered through the VA Central Office Library. You also have the option of unsubscribing from these Literature e-Alerts at any time. Once you become a subscriber, if you see a full-text article that you would like to get, contact your VA Librarian.

## VACO Notes

### **Farewell!**

ODI wishes Taylor Njagu, Equal Employment Specialist on ODI's Outreach and Retention team, a fond farewell! Mr. Njagu has accepted a position with another agency. Mr. Njagu will be missed and his contributions to ODI; the National Diversity Internship Program; and VA's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Program will not be forgotten! For questions regarding Mr. Njagu's programs, contact Tinisha Agramonte, Director of Outreach and Retention in ODI, at [Tinisha.Agramonte@va.gov](mailto:Tinisha.Agramonte@va.gov). For a complete list of contact information for ODI's programs, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/about/contact.aspx>.

### **May 14 Hiring and Promoting Persons with Disabilities Presentation**

Hiring Managers, Supervisors, Human Resources (HR) Specialists/Assistants, and HR Liaisons are invited to attend a presentation on "Hiring and Promoting Persons with Disabilities" on Tuesday, May 14, 2013, from 1:30-2:30 p.m. in VA Central Office conference room 630. Participants will learn how to recruit qualified candidates and will learn the legal requirements for hiring and promoting persons with disabilities, understand the targeted disabilities, and understand the Schedule A excepted appointment authority. For more information, contact Vernetta Fields at [Vernetta.Fields@va.gov](mailto:Vernetta.Fields@va.gov).

# Training

## VSSC Online Training

ODI announces the availability of training on the Veterans Health Administration's Support Service Center (VSSC) Human Resources (HR) Reporting Tools. VA uses VSSC to store HR data for all of VA in an easy to use reporting format. This interactive training is designed to alert a wide range of managers, HR, equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity specialists to VSSC's HR query applications. All managers have a duty to ensure there is equal opportunity in the workplace with regard to hiring, promotions, and other terms and conditions of employment. This training provides guidance on how to properly use the applications to conduct various workforce analyses, identify triggers, and define and distinguish between Relevant Civilian Labor Force and Civilian Labor Force. Training classes will be offered on the following dates from 10 am to noon (EST):

- Wednesday, June 19, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink\\_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569353](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569353))
- Wednesday, August 21, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink\\_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569354](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569354))
- Wednesday, September 18, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink\\_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569357](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569357))

Each session will be conducted via Live Meeting. You can register using the relevant link above. Once you click on the link, you will need to sign into the VA Talent Management System (TMS) and click confirm. Spaces are available on first-come, first-serve basis. If none of these dates work for you, you can use TMS to request additional dates. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ryan Pugh, Management and Program Analyst, ODI, at [Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov](mailto:Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov).

### Project Management Fellows Program

The Project Management (PM) Fellows Program at the Department of Veterans Affairs Acquisition Academy (VAAA) in Frederick, Maryland, is now accepting applications for the next class beginning Fall 2013.

The two-year program is specifically designed to go beyond the traditional Federal Acquisition Certification in Program/Project Management (FAC-P/PM), by building and reinforcing

critical PM and leadership skills within specialty tracks.

The program will accelerate the development and application of PM skills for VA professionals entering the project management field.

Interested applicants are not required to possess previous PM experience or training to apply.

VAAA is also seeking candidates who are already entry-level FAC-P/PM certified to participate in a yearlong PM Fellows class that will lead to mid-level FAC-P/PM certification. Members of the inaugural PM Fellows cohort are already reporting successful impacts on their organization.

If you are interested in participating in either of the cohorts beginning Fall 2013, please contact [PMFellows@va.gov](mailto:PMFellows@va.gov).

Don't miss this opportunity to join two cohorts on the path to project management excellence! For more information about the PM Fellows Program and VAAA, please visit <http://www.acquisitionacademy.va.gov/AcquisitionAcademy/schools/ppm/fellows.asp>.

### EEOC Training Institute Federal Sector Training Courses

Counselor Refresher—May 8 (Boston, MA)

Satisfies the eight hour annual training requirement for Federal EEO counselors. Provides experienced EEO counselors and other EEO practitioners with EEO law and skills updates.

Barrier Analysis—May 14–16 (Birmingham, AL)

Covers all aspects of the barrier analysis process. Offers hands-on simulations of situations typically encountered in preparing MD-715 reports.

Letters of Acceptance & Dismissal Decisions—May 14–15 (Dallas, TX)

Writing course provides tools and techniques for drafting letters of acceptance and dismissal for federal EEO complaints. Gain practical experience from exercises based on actual EEO cases.

To register or to view course descriptions, please visit Federal Sector Programs at <http://www.eeotraining.eeoc.gov>.

For information about registration, contact the EEOC Training Institute at 1-866-446-0940 or [eeoc.traininginstitute@eeoc.gov](mailto:eeoc.traininginstitute@eeoc.gov). **Continued on page 8.**

# Employees with Targeted Disabilities

## *Promotion Opportunities*

Did you know that Federal law requires VA to provide promotion opportunities to employees with disabilities? It also requires VA to hire people with disabilities into positions with promotion potential. 29 US Code 701, which is the Rehabilitation Act, was passed in 1973. Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, mandates that agencies submit “an annually updated affirmative action program plan for the hiring, placement, and advancement of individuals with disabilities.”

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides guidance on the subject, and allows agencies to focus on what it calls “targeted disabilities” (blindness, deafness, partial paralysis, total paralysis, missing extremities, dwarfism, epilepsy, psychiatric disabilities, and severe intellectual disabilities). The EEOC guidance is why VA has an annual goal for hiring people with targeted disabilities. For fiscal year (FY) 2013, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs set a goal that is three percent of all hires.

Hiring individuals with targeted disabilities only meets part of VA’s obligation under the Rehabilitation Act. The Department also needs to hire them into positions with promotion potential, and advance current employees with targeted disabilities who are qualified for positions at a higher pay level. EEOC has specifically said that “Favoring an individual with a disability over a non-disabled individual for purposes of affirmative action in hiring or advancement is not unlawful disparate treatment based on disability, and therefore does not violate the Rehabilitation Act. This rule stands in stark contrast to the legal standards under Title VII for making employment decisions based on race, color, sex, or national origin.”

At the end of FY 2012, VA permanent employees with targeted disabilities reached a ceiling at the GS 9/Title 38 equivalent pay level. Additionally, 21.65 percent of VA’s employees with targeted disabilities are in wage grade positions, compared to 7.95 percent of VA’s employees who do not have a disability. We know that we can do better, because VA already has high performing employees with targeted disabilities in the Senior Executive Service (SES); this group is slightly better represented at the SES level than employees without disabilities.

Improving promotion opportunities may also reduce the number of separations. In FY 2012, VA hired 700 individuals with targeted disabilities into permanent positions, but 556 employees with targeted disabilities separated. This makes it very difficult for VA to reach the two percent on board goal. To improve retention rates, VA needs to ensure that we provide reasonable accommodation (also required by the Rehabilitation Act) and promotion opportunities.

Not all employees with targeted disabilities will have the education and skills for promotion, but offices and facilities are encouraged to identify those who can be promoted. Employees who are interested in Title 5 positions can use the Schedule A excepted appointment authority to apply non-competitively for a promotion if the position was not identified as a merit promotion. Alternatively, employees can be moved laterally to a position with a career ladder. The former Director for the Battle Creek VA Medical Center identified some talented employees with targeted disabilities who were at the top of 5/7/9 career ladders and moved them to 9/11/12 career ladders. Facilities should publicize these options, as employees may not be aware that they can be considered for promotion outside of the usual competitive process. Some of VA’s employees with targeted disabilities are in college or graduate school. When these employees receive their degree, they are often eligible for a promotion. Facilities that publicize their willingness to promote will be more likely to learn which employees have recently earned an advanced degree.

Potential employees with the requisite education can be recruited by working with the disability services office at your local colleges and universities as well as medical and nursing schools. The Workforce Recruitment Program, which provides resumes for pre-screened job-ready college students and recent graduates with disabilities, is also a good source. Their list is released in December of each year. The Veterans Benefits Administration’s Regional Offices can steer qualified Disabled Veterans to VA jobs. Various Veteran organizations such as the Disabled American Veterans are also sources of candidates.

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# Secretary's D&I Awards

## *Congratulations to the Winners of the Third Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards*

VA established the Secretary's Annual Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Awards Program in 1988 to recognize EEO achievements associated with legally-protected classes established by EEO laws. In fiscal year (FY) 2009, ODI redesigned the awards program as "The Secretary's Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program" to align with the three goals of VA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2009–2013 endorsed by Secretary Eric K. Shinseki on May 22, 2009.



In alignment with President Obama's Executive Order 13583 on Establishing a Coordinated Government-Wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce, the Department recently produced a revised VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2012–2016. This year, the criteria for the Secretary's Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards were aligned with this plan: building a diverse, high-performing workforce that reflects all segments of society; cultivating a flexible, collaborative, and inclusive work environment that leverages diversity and empowers all contributors; and facilitating outstanding, culturally competent public service and stakeholder relations through effective leadership and accountability.

In the Manager/Supervisor category, the winner is **Dr. Rory A. Cooper**, VA Senior Research Career Scientist and Director, Human Engineering Research Laboratories, VA Center of Excellence in Wheelchairs and Associated Rehabilitation Engineering at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. Dr. Cooper was nominated for numerous reasons including his commitment to mentoring students with disabilities (emphasizing Veterans and their children), to improving VA and the University of Pittsburgh to better support Veterans with Disabilities, and to the people with disabilities and Veteran communities.

In the Nonsupervisory Employee category, the winner is **Dr. Laura Johnson**, Clinical Psychologist, Director of Diversity Services, and Transgender Veteran Liaison, who was nominated for numerous reasons including her work in promoting cultural competency and diversity at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford, Massachusetts.

In the Team category, the winner is the **Equal Employment Opportunity Committee at the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital** in Columbia, Missouri. This team was nominated for numerous reasons including their work in championing a diverse and inclusive workplace through collaborative opportunities, leadership development, succession planning, and diversity awareness activities. The team members include Machele Dykstra, Leigh Anne Fleck, Vicki J. Freelon, L. Stephen Gaither, James E. Grady, Sara Hake, Veronica Ramnarine, Darlayna Scott, Annette Velasco, Michael E. Whittier, and Paula D. Williams.

Congratulations again to the awardees! For more information on the Secretary's Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program and this year's winners, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/sec-awards.aspx>.

## Superior Service for Disabled Veterans

### *Palo Alto Receives VHA's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service of the Year Award*

The Palo Alto Health Care System's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service was recently awarded the Veterans Health Administration's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service of the Year Award, an honor given annually to one of 153 nationwide Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Services in VA.

"This was truly a team effort," said Dustin Thompson, Chief of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service. "My staff really stepped up. They were willing to try new ways of doing things. They are the ones doing the work, while I'm setting expectations and offering tools to excel in a supportive environment."

The team was judged in an array of criteria, including innovative processes, outstanding customer service, nationally-recognized survey results and compliance with performance measurements. [Continued on page 11.](#)

# Policy Alerts

## **VA Directive 5975**

Revised VA Directive 5975 is now posted online at [http://www.va.gov/vapubs/search\\_action.cfm?dType=1](http://www.va.gov/vapubs/search_action.cfm?dType=1). Major changes include the following:

- a. Change the name of the VA's Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI).
- b. Update and align VA's Diversity and Inclusion policy and programs with the Government-wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan under Executive Order (EO) 13583, and reflect VA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan goals to: build workforce diversity, cultivate workplace inclusion, and facilitate outstanding public service through education and accountability.
- c. Designate the Deputy Assistant Secretary for ODI as the VA Chief Diversity Officer in accordance with EO 13583 and describe the role and responsibilities of ODI.
- d. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of Administrations and Staff Office officials, and their respective Equal Employment Opportunity or Diversity and Inclusion Offices.
- e. Establish new programs and initiatives to address emerging diversity and inclusion issues including, but not limited to, the VA Diversity Council; the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender special emphasis program; and Diversity and Inclusion training.

The related handbooks are pending publication.

## **Guidance on Implementing Peer Specialist and Peer Support Apprentice Positions in the GS-102 Series**

The subject HRML rescinds and replaces HRML No. 05-12-09 of the same title, dated July 17, 2012.

Based on March 18, 2013 formal advice from the General Counsel of the Department of Veterans Affairs, HRML No. 05-13-04 communicates that for hiring into the Peer occupation from that date forward, the governing definition of "Veteran" is now the one in 38 U.S.C. 101(2).

Secondly, the replacement HRML further clarifies that HR staff are to limit their use of applicant assessment questions to the screen-out questions in the HRML's Attachment A, because Mental Health hiring officials will obtain any supplemental personal history from those qualified candidates whom the HR staff refers for selection consideration.

VA HR Offices may e-mail questions about HRML No. 05-13-04 to the Title 5 Staffing Policy Team at [vatitlestaffingpoli@va.gov](mailto:vatitlestaffingpoli@va.gov).

## **Incorporating Procedures if using USA Staffing for Recruiting**

Changes were made to VA Handbook 5005 to incorporate procedures if using the USA Staffing system to recruit for Title 5 and Title 38 vacancies.

The policy has been approved for publication and is pending completion of posting to the OHRM web page.

## **Streamlining Referral Policy**

Changes were made to the selection certificate referral requirements noted in VA Handbook 5005. The new referral process reduces the requirements for separate referrals but does not prohibit issuing additional referrals if desired or otherwise necessary (for example, to refer facility employees before other candidates).

The policy has been approved for publication and is pending completion of posting to the OHRM web page.

# Commemorate

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VA will continue to develop and implement strategies to improve recruitment outreach and career development opportunities for groups with less than expected participation rates including AAPIs. In addition to employing AAPIs, VA also provides services to and recognizes the contributions of AAPI Veterans who represent 2.81 percent of the VA total workforce. Today, there are approximately 300,000 AAPI Veterans, representing 1.24 percent of the total Veteran population.

Employees and managers are encouraged to participate in and support attendance at meaningful Asian/Pacific American History Month activities to recognize the important contributions of AAPIs inside and outside of VA's workforce. For more information on VA's AAPI Program, contact Andy Gonzalez, VA's National AAPI Employment Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 299-4320 or [Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov](mailto:Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov) or visit VA's AAPI Employment Program Web site at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/aapi.aspx>.

*There will be a number of programs held at VA Central Office (VACO) in observance of AAPI Heritage Month. The kick-off program was held Thursday, May 2, 2013, and was hosted by Dat Tran, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Data Governance and Analysis, Office of Policy and Planning. The guest speaker was Terry Shima, a WWII Veteran. On February 15, 2013, President Obama awarded Mr. Shima the 2012 Presidential Citizens Medal, the Nation's second-highest civilian award. An educational event will be held Thursday, May 16, 2013. Lisa Fan with the Asian Community Service Center will be presenting a seminar on Chinese culture. The third and final VACO event will be a cultural fair held on Thursday, May 30, 2013, which will feature displays, dancers, a fashion show, and a slide show to increase awareness and understanding of the diversity of AAPI cultures. All three programs will be held at noon in the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230.*

## ***Jewish American Heritage Month***

During May 2013, VA proudly joins the Nation in celebrating the ninth official Jewish American Heritage Month. This month commemorates 428 years of Jewish American achievements and contributions to American culture and society. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter first recognized April 21–18, 1980, as Jewish American Week. Then, in 2006, the month of May was deemed as Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) by President George W. Bush, which is still celebrated today. Jewish American Heritage Month acknowledges the achievements and contributions of Jewish Americans in the United States. This year's theme, as established by the Jewish American Heritage Month Coalition, is "American Jews in Entertainment." According to the JAHM Coalition, "acknowledges the achievements of American Jews in fields ranging from sports and arts and entertainment to medicine, business, science, government, and military service."

This year's theme reflects on the contributions of Jews to the American entertainment world. Just a few of these individuals include Bob Dylan (musician), Adam Sandler (actor-comedian), Estee Lauder (business woman-skin care), Sandy Koufax (baseball), Barbra Streisand (actress-singer), Ann Landers (writer), Houdini (magician), Joan Rivers (actress-comedian), Irving Berlin (songwriter), Sarah Silverman (comedian), and Groucho Marx (actor-comedian). These individuals transformed our culture and left and continue to leave lasting impressions on our society.

The North American Jewish Data Bank identified that in January 2013 there were approximately 6.5 million Jewish Americans in the United States. Although data regarding religion is not captured by VA for its employees or for our Nation's Veterans, VA recognizes that many employees and the Veterans they serve are Jewish Americans and embraces and salutes them. This month, all employees are encouraged to celebrate Jewish Americans through learning activities, social functions, and programs intended to enlighten individuals about Jewish American history and its positive impact on our society.

For more information on Jewish American History and events celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month, visit <http://www.jewishheritagemonth.gov>. ***Continued on page 9.***

# More Training

Continued from page 3.

## **Diversity News: An Online Training Resource**

The May/June 2013 edition of Diversity News focuses on the “career lifecycle” and MyCareer@VA.



Diversity News is available both on the internal VA Knowledge Network and on ODI's external Web site. To view current and past episodes, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx>.

## **IALPAE Conference**

The International Association of Latino Public Administration Executives (IALPAE) will hold its Executive Leadership, Diversity & Training Conference on August 27–29, 2013, at the Holiday Inn-Key Bridge in Arlington, Virginia. The theme for this year's conference is “Leading the President's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion: Demonstrating Excellence, Equity, Integrity, and Transparency in Public Service.”

This conference qualifies as training in compliance with 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41 and is open to all Federal employees. The Conference will offer workshops and presentations aimed at enhancing executive skills and preparing individuals for the Senior Executive Service. Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistance Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion, will be the keynote speaker during the luncheon on August 27.

IALPAE, Inc is a nonprofit professional membership organization founded in 2006. Their mission is to be a leading public service organization that advances the dissemination of information on public administration, promotes the value of public administration and public service as a career, particularly to the Latino community, provides networking and professional development opportunities to individuals committed to public service, entrepreneurship, human rights, and democracy globally.

All VA attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs associated with attending the conference must be authorized by your organization. Additional information is available at <http://www.ialpae.org>. Prior to registering, you must receive appropriate approvals including travel approval from your organization.

## **SAIGE Conference**

The Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) will hold its 10th Annual National Training Program (NTP) on June 3–7, 2013, in Spokane, Washington. The SAIGE NTP qualifies as training in compliance with 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41 and is open to all Federal employees and Veterans. It will provide a forum to discuss the most current issues facing the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) community such as Indian Country and Federal Indian Law, Equal Employment Opportunity and Human Resources, Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resources, Leadership and Professional Development, and Wellness and Health. Additionally, the program will highlight Federal benefits available to Veterans.

ODI will present a no-fee VA Forum on Monday, June 3, 2013, from 1–5 pm, designed to provide VA employees and Veterans with information on VA goals and objectives as they pertain to the AI/AN Employment Program, including: VA's AI/AN workforce demographics; health issues impacting the AI/AN community; career development and advancement initiatives; and Veteran employment initiatives.

Employees in the local commuting area are encouraged to attend the Forum, with supervisory approval. All attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs and registration associated with attending the main NTP must be authorized and coordinated by your organization.

Additional NTP information such as registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules, are available at <http://www.saige.org>. Prior to registering, you must receive appropriate approvals, including travel approval, from your organization. To register for the VA Forum, please visit the link below, which will take you directly to the VA Talent Management System (TMS). Once you log in, you will be redirected to the scheduled offering for registration: [https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink\\_redirect.jsp?linkId=SCHEDULED\\_OFFERING\\_DETAILS&scheduleID=2590084](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=SCHEDULED_OFFERING_DETAILS&scheduleID=2590084). Please note that registration via TMS does not constitute registration for the main conference.

For additional information contact Andy Gonzalez, VA's AI/AN Employment Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 299-4320 or via e-mail at [Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov](mailto:Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov).





# Commemorate

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## References:

Jewish American Heritage Month Coalition (2013). Retrieved April 12, 2013 from <http://www.jewishamericanheritagemonth.us/index.aspx>.

The North American Jewish Data Bank (2013). Retrieved April 12, 2013 from [http://www.jewishdatabank.org/FAQs/FAQs Table I And IIa.pdf](http://www.jewishdatabank.org/FAQs/FAQs%20Table%20I%20And%20IIa.pdf).

## **Older Americans Month**

VA joins the Nation in observing Older Americans Month in May. From the 2012 Presidential Proclamation (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/presidential-proclamation-older-americans-month-2012>):

America endured great trials and heralded defining triumphs over the course of the 20th century, and the men and women who saw us through that time remain among our Nation's greatest assets. Through their guiding wisdom, enduring love of family, and inspiring commitment to country, older Americans continue to steer and enhance our national life...Our seniors make countless contributions as active participants in communities across America. From our parks and schools to our faith and service organizations, the generosity and talents of active seniors augment our children's education, bring our families together, and strengthen the fabric of our society...Our seniors have devoted their entire lives to building the future their children and grandchildren deserve. During Older Americans Month, we celebrate their successes and recommit to supporting them as they shape America's next great generation.

## **National Day of Prayer**

VA joins the Nation in observing the National Day of Prayer on May 2, 2013. From the 2012 Presidential Proclamation (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/presidential-proclamation-national-day-prayer-2012>):

Prayer has always been a part of the American story, and today countless Americans rely on prayer for comfort, direction, and strength, praying not only for themselves, but for their communities, their country, and the world.

On this National Day of Prayer, we give thanks for our democracy that respects the beliefs and protects the religious freedom of all people to pray, worship, or abstain according to the dictates of their conscience. Let us pray for all the citizens of our great Nation, particularly those who are sick, mourning, or without hope, and ask God for the sustenance to meet the challenges we face as a Nation. May we embrace the responsibility we have to each other, and rely on the better angels of our nature in service to one another. Let us be humble in our convictions, and courageous in our virtue. Let us pray for those who are suffering around the world, and let us be open to opportunities to ease that suffering.

Let us also pay tribute to the men and women of our Armed Forces who have answered our country's call to serve with honor in the pursuit of peace. Our grateful Nation is humbled by the sacrifices made to protect and defend our security and freedom. Let us pray for the continued strength and safety of our service members and their families. While we pause to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice defending liberty, let us remember and lend our voices to the principles for which they fought—unity, human dignity, and the pursuit of justice.

## **Military Spouse Appreciation Day**

VA joins the Nation in commemorating Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 10, 2013. From the 2012 Presidential Proclamation (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/11/presidential-proclamation-military-spouse-appreciation-day-2012>):

For more than two centuries, our freedom has been safeguarded by brave patriots who have stepped forward and sworn an oath to defend the principles upon which our Republic was founded. Alongside these selfless heroes, our Nation's military spouses also offer tremendous service and make great sacrifices for our country. [Continued on the next page.](#)

# Commemorate

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On Military Spouse Appreciation Day, we recognize the important role our military families play in keeping our Armed Forces strong and our country safe.

Our military spouses are a vital part of communities across America and around the world. We know them as our neighbors and friends, colleagues and coaches, teachers and nurses. They move from duty station to duty station, picking up their families and careers whenever their country asks. They keep their households running while dealing with the strain of deployment. They support our wounded warriors, preserve the legacies of our fallen, and find ways to give back to our country day after day.

Inspired by the stories of our military spouses' resilience and service, First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden launched the Joining Forces initiative to encourage all Americans to recognize, honor, and serve our military families. In only 1 year, Joining Forces has rallied American businesses to hire tens of thousands of veterans and military spouses, schools have improved educational opportunities for military children, and the medical community has vowed better care for military families. And from small towns to big cities, Americans have shown their gratitude by pledging hours of service and taking on projects that support military families in their communities. To learn more and get involved, visit [www.JoiningForces.gov](http://www.JoiningForces.gov).

America's service members represent only one percent of our population, but they shoulder the responsibility of protecting our entire Nation and defending the ideals we hold dear. Just as we bear a sacred obligation to serve our men and women in uniform as well as they have served us, we share an equal responsibility to care for their extraordinary spouses who are heroes on the home front. On Military Spouse Appreciation Day, let us honor the unparalleled contributions of our military spouses and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring the priorities of our military families remain the priorities of our Nation.

## **National Women's Health Week**

VA joins the Nation in commemorating National Women's Health Week May 12–18. From the 2012 Presidential Proclamation (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/14/presidential-proclamation-national-womens-health-week>):

Women have guided our country toward prosperity and progress, and our Nation's success depends on their well-being. While women often play a leading role in making medical decisions for their families, their own health care needs have too often gone unmet. During National Women's Health Week, we recommit to making health care more accessible and affordable for women across our country...National Women's Health Week presents an opportunity for all women to prioritize their well-being by scheduling annual check-ups and screenings. To find more information on women's preventive care, visit [www.WomensHealth.gov](http://www.WomensHealth.gov) or [www.GirlsHealth.gov](http://www.GirlsHealth.gov)...As we celebrate the progress we have made, we recognize that American families cannot afford a return to the days when women were over-charged and denied access to critical services. During National Women's Health Week, let us move forward in pursuit of a fairer, healthier America.

## **Armed Forces Day**

VA joins the Nation in commemorating Armed Forces Day on May 18, 2013. From the 2012 Presidential Proclamation (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/14/presidential-proclamation-national-womens-health-week>):

With every assignment and in every theater, America's men and women in uniform perform their duties with the utmost dignity, honor, and professionalism. Through their dauntless courage and dedication, they live up to our Nation's highest ideals in even the most perilous circumstances. On Armed Forces Day, we pay tribute to the unparalleled service of our Armed Forces and recall the extraordinary feats they accomplish in defense of our Nation. [Continued on the next page.](#)

# Commemorate

[Continued from the previous page.](#)

As individuals, our service members set extraordinary examples of character for those whose freedom they protect. Together, they comprise the greatest force for freedom and security the world has ever known. From their earliest training to the thick of battle, they look to those with whom they stand shoulder-to-shoulder, knowing they rise and fall as one team. United in their love of country, they teach us the true meaning of words like duty, honor, and strength.

Not just leaders and troops, patriots and heroes, the members of our Armed Forces are also parents, spouses, partners, sons, and daughters. Their families are just as vital to their success as their brothers and sisters in arms, and our debt of gratitude extends to them as well. As we celebrate the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen who make our way of life possible, we also pay our deepest respect to their families, our missing, our wounded, and our fallen. Inspired by their service and humbled by their sacrifice, let us recommit to providing all those who have served our Nation the support they deserve.

## Employees with Targeted Disabilities

[Continued from page 4.](#)

The new job announcement templates encourage people with disabilities to apply. The Title 5 template includes information on the Schedule A excepted service appointment authority, which allows candidates with disabilities to be hired with no competition; they only need to be minimally qualified. Schedule A can also be used to hire someone to a Title 5 position without announcing the job. The Title 38 template has language encouraging people with disabilities to apply. These announcements may also explain that Title 38 jobs are not covered by the Schedule A excepted appointment authority. In addition, all job announcements must specify any physical requirements. Please ensure that your facility's job announcements are using the required language.

VA has done very well at meeting the Secretary's goal for hiring people with targeted disabilities. Now we need to ensure that we are hiring people who have promotion potential and provide them with promotion opportunities.

## Palo Alto Awarded

[Continued from page 5.](#)

Mr. Thompson said he believes his hardworking team has won national recognition, in part, due to a simple innovative change that resulted in a dramatic increase in efficiency. "We began giving our procurement staff work orders that were specific to their specialized skills, and we shared this information with our clinical staff," he explained. "This transformation increased our team's satisfaction with their jobs. It also decreased the number of pending work orders by 75 percent."

Mr. Thompson described other practices and his management approach toward full staff inclusion that resulted in greater employee engagement and job satisfaction. "We believe in ensuring our staff [members] have a voice and are empowered to effect change in their work environment," he said.

In order to help the staff understand Lean processes as well as Process Improvement Fundamentals (which Mr. Thompson co-teaches for the facility), the Service held a kick-off retreat in October 2012 and provided the Process Improvement framework. "We then gave them a platform to share their ideas and frustrations...took that feedback and used it to make small changes in their daily activities, giving full credit to those whose ideas were used. This gave them a chance to see that we were invested in their development and that even small changes can make big differences."

Service employees are also offered peer-to-peer training for job-specific needs as well as additional training solely for self-betterment such as stress management and time management and organization. [Continued on the next page.](#)

# Palo Alto Awarded

Continued from the previous page.

According to Mr. Thompson, the Service also has an Employee of the Month/Quarter/Year (EOM/EOQ/EOY) program. The nominees come from management, Service staff, facility staff, and Veterans (through their Customer Service Survey). All nominees are recognized and the winner of EOM is given a certificate and four hours annual leave at the Service's monthly staff meetings at which refreshments are provided. The EOQ is voted on by the Service staff from the three EOM winners. That individual is recognized with a certificate and a \$500 cash award at a monthly staff meeting. The EOY is selected by the management team and receives a plaque and \$1,000 cash award.

In fiscal year (FY) 2013, Mr. Thompson says, the Service decided to tie these two programs together and have changed the nomination criteria for EOM to include employees' process improvement ideas. The Service held a training using previously made changes as examples of how to make suggestions to ensure that all involved understood not only how to make the process work but why the process is important, and also to help them live the "work smarter, not harder" concept.

According to Mr. Thompson, Palo Alto Health Care System's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service is also successful because the skills and talents of the diverse staff are appreciated and included. "I have me; I don't need 25 more of me," he says.

To reach a diverse pool of applicants when there are vacancies in the Service, Mr. Thompson ensures that announcements are advertised widely and reach various people and groups. "Some positions require specific credentials," says Mr. Thompson, "but even [for] the ones that don't, we look for the optimal mix of education and/or experience."

When Mr. Thompson began at the Palo Alto Health Care System's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service he asked for input from all levels. He met with each employee individually and told them of his expectations for them and asked them what their expectations were for him.

"I then asked them what they liked and didn't like about their jobs and what their career goals were. I also asked them to tell me one thing they thought should be changed about the Service and also the one thing they would do all day if they could....Realizing that it takes a very long time to trust someone, I simply walked the walk every day."

Mr. Thompson reports that it has taken awhile, having been with the Service for almost two years now, but Service employees have seen that, "I value their input and shine the spotlight on them as opposed to myself." When an idea was shared, if it had merit, it was piloted and, if successful, it was adopted. "The person who made the suggestion was recognized at a staff meeting. If an idea was presented that wasn't as strong as it needed to be, I would work with the employee to make changes to their idea based on asking them specific questions to find out their thought processes as opposed to solely giving my opinion," says Mr. Thompson.

"There were times when I asked them to trust me when I changed processes but I always explained why we were making changes and assured them we would be successful. I had a vision for the Service and I articulated it to them and asked for their input in revising it if necessary. I also reminded them of our vision every time we met and I made sure to tie all changes and improvements to the vision and strategic plan of the healthcare system."

Mr. Thompson reports that he had some immediate successes. For example, the Service reported 100 percent on-time orders, something that was never accomplished previously. "We were able to achieve that goal within one month due to a redistribution of workload based on staff skills and preferences," Mr. Thompson says. "[T]here is value in trying to improve all our processes and...nothing is too small to matter. Everyone has value and everyone has talents and working together to achieve a common goal is a simple way to make a difference in their lives and the lives of the Veterans we serve."

Congratulations to Mr. Thompson and his team!



# Compliance Corner

## *Supervisors: Your Words Are Important*



No supervisor or manager likes when a discrimination complaint is filed against them. They may feel offended, angry, or disappointed that an employee would take such an action. However, it is never appropriate for managers and supervisors to publicly express hostility toward the equal employment opportunity (EEO) complaint process or the employee who filed the complaint. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has determined that such conduct is a per se violation of the letter and spirit of Title VII and its regulations. These regulations require agencies to promote and support the full realization of EEO in their policies and practices. The EEOC has determined that retaliation harms the public interest by deterring others from filing complaints.

The EEOC has held that statements or actions by a supervisor may be a per se violation of the EEOC's regulations when a supervisor intimidates an employee and interferes with her EEO activity in any manner. EEOC decisions have found violations of Title VII when managers have exerted pressure on complainants to drop EEO complaints or not to file them, complained about, criticized or discredited EEO activity, disclosed EEO activity, encouraged a complainant to resign, instituted policies that discourage EEO activity, and threatened complainants with reassignment, termination, and civil, criminal and defamation suits because they engaged in protected activity.

In a recent VA case, a supervisor stated the following during a staff meeting, "I have yet to see a valid EEO complaint, and if I did, I would act promptly, but I see many EEO complaints started because of a lack of character." The supervisor continued, "I am very transparent and would like to place every complaint, as well as, every good comment on the board" and "there are too many rumors floating around about [EEO complaints]...it would be good for everyone to see what complaints were being made by whom and what the outcome would be." The Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA) found that the supervisor's comments would be reasonably likely to deter protected EEO activity by those employees present at the meeting and that the statements, themselves, expressed hostility toward the EEO process.

OEDCA again found per se reprisal when a supervisor openly made derogatory comments about the EEO process and the complainant's involvement in EEO activity. For example, he stated in a supervisory staff meeting that an EEO complaint had been filed against him, and that the unidentified employee had lied about him in the complaint. Several months later he confronted the complainant telling her, "You got what you wanted in your EEO complaint. Now the supervisors will report to you." In a subsequent staff meeting, the supervisor remarked, "We will now be more strict because of the EEO lies..." and then proceeded to identify the complainant as the employee responsible for the "EEO lies". Finally, the supervisor stated in a staff meeting that "I need another raise anyway, so complain on" inferring that he expected another complaint would lead to a pay raise. ~Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA's Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication

## Diversity Council Activity

### *Meeting Minutes Available Online*

The next VA Diversity Council (VADC) quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 17, 2013, from 1 to 3 pm in VA Central Office room 830 and via teleconference. The VADC serves as an independent executive level body that provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on areas related to diversity and inclusion. The Council is composed of representatives from each of the Department's major organizations, staff offices, and stakeholders and serves as a communications link between the workforce and leadership and a forum to share best practices, consider new initiatives, monitor progress, leverage resources, and ensure accountability in the area of organizational diversity and inclusion. The Council ensures that diversity and inclusion considerations are integrated throughout VA's strategic planning efforts, business practices, and organizational components. Future Council meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, October 16, 2013; and Wednesday, January 15, 2014. Meeting agendas and minutes, the roster, and a copy of the charter are housed online at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/council>.

Diversity@Work  
is published by the U.S.  
Department of Veterans  
Affairs' (VA's) Office of  
Diversity and Inclusion (ODI),  
a program office within the  
Office of Human Resources  
and Administration (HR&A).

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## OTHER USEFUL LINKS

HR&A  
[http://www.va.gov/  
ofcadmin](http://www.va.gov/ofcadmin)

VA's Office of Human  
Resources Management  
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VA's Office of Resolution  
Management  
<http://www.va.gov/orm>

Veterans Health  
Administration's Diversity and  
Inclusion Community of  
Practice  
[Michael.Youngblood@  
va.gov](mailto:Michael.Youngblood@va.gov)

## GOT NEWS?

We want to hear from you! If  
you'd like to share your story  
ideas, comments, or  
suggestions, e-mail us at  
[odi@va.gov](mailto:odi@va.gov).

# D&I Online

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs' diversity and inclusion program is to develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated, and strategic focus on diversity and inclusion as key components of the Department's human resources strategies. Here's a sampling of online tools available at <http://www.diversity.va.gov> that can help leverage diversity and build inclusion:

- ▶ Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and other observance resources.
- ▶ Training resources, guides, and reports.
- ▶ Links to professional and community organizations.
- ▶ Best practices for diversity management.



## D&I In Your E-mail Inbox

Once a week, ODI sends out *NewsLink*, an e-mail message with annotated links to current news items and other information related to leveraging diversity and building inclusion. For a FREE subscription to this weekly electronic news service, e-mail [odi@va.gov](mailto:odi@va.gov) with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWSLINK in the subject line. Find a sample of *NewsLink* at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/newslink.aspx>.

## D&I on Your TV or PC

*Diversity News* is a video program co-produced by ODI and the VA Central Office Broadcast Center for you. *Diversity News* follows VA News on the VA Knowledge Network, Content Distribution Network, channel 2. Programs are also available at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx>.

## May 2013 Calendar

<http://www.diversity.va.gov/calendar>

Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Heritage Month

Mother's Day  
May 12

Jewish American Heritage Month

National Women's Health Week  
May 12-18

Older Americans Month

May Day/Lei Day/Beltane  
May 1

The Conference Board Women's Leadership  
Conference  
May 14-15; New York, NY  
[http://www.conference-board.org/  
conferences/conferencedetail.cfm?  
conferenceid=2457&topicid=40&subtopic  
id=130](http://www.conference-board.org/conferences/conferencedetail.cfm?conferenceid=2457&topicid=40&subtopicid=130)

National Day of Prayer  
May 2

28th Federal Asian Pacific American  
Council National Leadership Training  
Program  
May 6-10  
<http://www.fapac.org>

Armed Forces Day  
May 18

V-E (Victory in Europe) Day  
May 8

Memorial Day  
May 27

Military Spouse Appreciation Day  
May 10